THE SHINGLETON MYSTERY.

A SEA-SIDE STORY.

By Dudley Costello.

Merely to say of Shingleton that it is a rising watering-place, would be to give offence to every one of its five hundred regular inhabitants; yet, if it contain no more than that number, I do not see why Shingleton should not have expectations, and hope to rise.

Such, in fact, must be the case, or how does it happen that, at present, Shingleton is overbuilt, more apartments—if not houses—being to let in it than there are visitors to fill them, even in the height of the season?

Some magnificent ideas went towards the laying out of Shingleton, but they remain unaccomplished. The Royal Crescent exhibits only one horn, the Royal-square only half deserves its name, the Royal Promenade stretches in front of a very imperfectly occupied range of buildings, and the Royal Swimming-baths are not yet begun. These are signs either of caution or recklessness, of prudent speculation or headlong bankruptcy: the builders of Shingleton either stopped in time, or only stopped when they had no longer the means of going on. Be this as it may, there Shingleton stands, another monument to the vanity of human wishes of which the world contains so many examples.

But although incomplete and unfinished, Shingleton is not without attractions. A fine range of breezy downs lies behind the town, a fine expanse of open sea—breezy enough, too, upon occasion—spreads before it; there are sands at low water, and, when the tide is in, you see how appropriately Shingleton is named; donkeys and bathing-machines are also among the properties of the place, and there is a riding-master who has an establishment of four horses and three ponies. Nor is this all: the Royal Promenade Rooms supply the usual sea-side literature; a German band makes its appearance twice a week, arriving nobody knows how, and departing nobody knows when; wandering acrobats halt now and then to pick up charitable pence; natural history on wheels suns itself sometimes on the road that skirts the Royal Promenade; and itinerant vendors of sea-side curiosities take Shingleton on their way to somewhere else.

On a small scale, then, allowing for drawbacks, and substituting good intentions—that very dangerous pavement—for downright performances, you have at Shingleton very much the same kind of thing that you get in places of higher renown: and unless tormented by the fiend Ambition, who delights in showing off before the multitude, you may pass one or two months there pleasantly enough, according to the mind you carry with you.

Most people have some reason to give for the choice they make of their sea-side home. The exceptions, who, like Brummel going out to dinner, tell their valet to put them into a carriage and drive them somewhere, are very few in number. Some seek retirement, some a crowd; some

health; some mere amusement; and so on. The motive which induced Mr. Benjamin Smurfitt to visit Shingleton was an inordinate fondness for prawns.

Long before the skill of the architect had been called in to convert a small fishing-village into a fashionable watering-place, the fame of the Shingleton prawns had spread far and wide; and long before his retirement from business, Mr. Benjamin Smurfitt had inwardly resolved that, whenever that event took place, he would go to Shingleton and have his fill of prawns. Thirty years is a long interval between the birth of an idea and its realisation as a fact, but for thirty years did Mr. Benjamin Smurfitt toil in the pursuit of wealth and his crustacean reward.

Mr. Smurfitt was in the brush-making line, a branch of art which has very extensive ramifications, leading upward to shower-baths and smoke-jacks, downward to dusters and door-mats, and embracing in one broad, universal level nearly all the refinements of the scullery, the pantry, and the kitchen. "Persons about to marry" were enjoined in the newspapers to "go to Smurfitt's, The Little Dustpan, Duke-street, Manchester-square, where only," &c.; and by dint of advertisements on the one hand, and really fulfilling the promises made in them on the other, the advertiser at length became a man of money, and withdrew—as he said—from public life.

While Smurfitt had been making his fortune, Shingleton—to a certain extent—was acquiring celebrity. Like "The Little Dustpan" in Duke-street, Shingleton also had been well advertised. The building company who took the matter in hand quoted (an apocryphal passage in) the Registrar-General's annual report to show that Shingleton was the healthiest place in England; it was acknowledged, they said, on all hands, to be the most delightful spot on the coast; the same interest declared that, when the direct Shingleton line was finished, it would be more accessible than Blazetown, to which it was even now a formidable rival; and as to the creature-comforts of Shingleton, nothing more was necessary than to point with pride to its prawns. Thus conscientiously recommended, Shingleton became what has already been described—and thither, with more than a lover's eagerness, Mr. Smurfitt went to realise the day-dream of his existence.

Of a lover's eagerness, indeed, Mr. Smurfitt knew nothing, for, though he had reached his fifty-fifth year, he had never been in love. Absorbed in bristles and rope-yarn and such-like unyielding substances, for thirty years he gave no thought to anything more tractable or tender; for to the last-named category his housekeeper, Mrs. Bruff, could hardly be said to belong, so little of either were in her temper or aspect. That Mrs. Bruff, despite her inward and outward woman, entertained thoughts with respect to Mr. Smurfitt which have—or appear to have—some affinity with sentiment, was quite another thing; but though her entertainment of them had made no impression on the heart of Smurfitt, it helped without doubt to keep that heart free from other impressions, supposing him weak enough at any moment to have relaxed in his attentions to rope-yarn and bristles. To tell the truth, though Mr. Smurfitt seemed impassive as a merman—a little, too, perhaps on that very account, as far as she was personally concerned—Mrs. Bruff was indescribably jealous. If she could not win him herself, she took every domestic precaution to

prevent any one else from doing so, and, with respect to out-of-door transactions, she guarded him with more than feline watchfulness. This excessive vigilance would have made many a man miserable, but Smurfitt, though he winced a little now and then, took it very easily on the whole, and at length it became almost an article in his creed that of all the pitfals of life there is none so dangerous as matrimony.

As a confirmed bachelor, then, Mr. Smurfitt went to Shingleton, and so resolute to appear what he was, that he left Mrs. Bruff behind. It cost her something to acquiesce in this arrangement, for there was no knowing what might happen to her master when he was out of her sight and so far away, but in this particular Mr. Smurfitt was inexorable: he was going in for prawns, and, as he said, the only way to do that with any degree of satisfaction, was to have them to himself. Ah, if Smurfitt had but known that there were prawns in the West Indies, equal in flavour to those of Shingleton and three times their size, he would have braved all the terrors of the Atlantic to get at them; and, had he made the Jamaica voyage, it is more than probable that Mrs. Bruff's apprehensions would have come to pass. But I must not anticipate.

The frequenters of the Royal Promenade Rooms at Shingleton, as they laboriously strove, in the beginning of August last, to beguile the time and cheat the skyey influences of our delicious summer, whose harvest is still ungarnered, read with more than common interest—there being only seven visitors in the place at that time—the announcement, in the fashionable column of the *Shingleton Gazette*, that Benjamin Smurfitt, Esquire, was among the latest arrivals, and "occupied apartments" at Unicorn Mansion: the editor had caught the true Blazetown style, and Shingleton had adopted the true Blazetown nomenclature. Moreover, as they read, they might have been aware—in fact, they could not help knowing, as he was the only stranger who had appeared at the Rooms all the week—that Benjamin Smurfitt, Esquire, was in presence before them, seeking recreation like themselves, and—like themselves—not finding it. This being the case, it may be convenient here to describe the personal appearance of Mr. Smurfitt, borrowing the description from his own photographed *carte de visite*. As his tendencies were not at all literary, he had chosen "The Library style," surrounding himself with bookcases which he had never seen, and gazing on books he had never opened. He was bald-headed, of course—that helped the literary illusion; blunt featured—that denoted sagacity; short—all your intellectually-great men are so; stout—well, to be stout, in Smurfitt's opinion, was to be manly; so, as a short, stout, blunt-featured, bald-headed man, he stood, when he was in Regent-street, before the artist's painted library; and, with the decorations only changed, and his hat on, so he appeared at the Royal Promenade Rooms, Shingleton.

I can't say that anybody there was much taken with Mr. Smurfitt's appearance, except, perhaps, the proprietor of the establishment, who booked his subscription; but as a new comer was a godsend at Shingleton, and the day was unusually wet—complete saturation being rapidly achieved—he soon found some one to talk to him. Conversation was a safety-valve to Mr. Smurfitt at that moment, for he was exceedingly out of temper, and wanted to give vent to it. Out of temper? And at Shingleton? Yes! Mr. Smurfitt was a disappointed man. He had been

nearly four-and-twenty hours at Shingleton, and hadn't yet seen a single prawn! But he shall speak for himself.

The weather had naturally made an opening.

"Wet day, sir! Yes. Shamefully wet, I call it," replied Mr. Smurfitt to his interlocutor, an elderly twaddler, who seemed as if he also had retired from business, and would be glad to get back to it again; "when one comes into the country one don't expect to be treated in this way."

The elderly twaddler was one who accepted his fate more patiently than Mr. Smurfitt: probably he was not so well off.

"I'm not partial to wet weather myself, sir," he replied; "it keeps one so much in-doors. What with the rain and the wind, it was as much as I could do to get here this morning, though Marine Villa, where I'm lodging, is not a couple of hundred yards off. I really thought I couldn't have kep' my legs, the wind was so uncommon high."

"That's where it is, sir," returned Mr. Smurfitt, boiling and bubbling with indignation; "it's the beastly wind that does it! I call it a perfect imposition—a regular downright swindle! Look here, sir," he continued: "I come down to Shingleton on purpose to eat prawns, and what's the first thing I hear? Very sorry, but there are none to be had. Forced to go without 'em at tea, sir, yesterday; forced to go without 'em at breakfast again, this morning. Same story repeated: high wind, rough sea, not a prawn in the town. What signifies wind and sea! They ought always to be had. You can get oysters whenever you want 'em—why not prawns?"

"Potted prawns are very nice, sir," mildly interposed The Twaddler.

"Potted nonsense!" retorted Mr. Smurfitt, more angry than ever. "It spoils 'em altogether. Clarified butter takes away the taste! Quite another thing when they're fresh! Relish of the sea about them—firm, juicy, delicious! I hate potted meats, sir; potted prawns worse than anything else. I wish I was lord-lieutenant of the county—mayor of the town—inspector of the police—harbour-master, or what not—I'd bind these fellows down in a penalty of—of—of—twenty pounds—twenty pounds, sir, at the very least—for every day they made me go without prawns. I'd soon bring 'em to their senses!"

"Well, really," said The Twaddler, rubbing the window-pane with his cuff, "I do think it's going to clear up! It looks lighter out at sea, and don't seem quite so blusterous. Perhaps they'll catch some this afternoon!"

"If they don't," said Mr. Smurfitt, firmly, "I know what I'll do!"

There is no threat so terrible as that, the actual purport of which is unrevealed; and, to use a familiar phrase, The Twaddler almost shook in his shoes as he glanced at the angry countenance of Mr. Smurfitt.

But as storms clear away from the face of the ocean, so the wrath of the retired brushmaker, having spent its fury, gradually subsided. Mr. Smurfitt became more conversable, and the chit-chat gently filtered through the lips of The Twaddler fell soothingly on the ear of his listener. He learned by this means who the celebrities were that constituted the company then staying at Shingleton, what the amusements of the place, how, at stated periods, the Band or the Ethiopian Serenaders made their appearance, what was done on the shingle at high water and what on the sands when the tide went out, where the best donkeys were

to be hired, how many church services there were on Sundays, what time they began, when they ended, who preached——But no, I can conceive nothing more cruel than the repetition of The Twaddler's information: let it suffice that he made Mr. Smurfitt as completely *au fait* of what was going on at Shingleton as if he had been the oldest spinster inhabitant.

Notwithstanding The Twaddler's prediction—notwithstanding his attempt to verify it by tapping the glass with his knuckle, and then wondering why it did not rise—the rain pelted and the wind blew as if it had never rained or blown before, and when the afternoon had been spent in the desultory way common to all afternoons that are passed in Marine Libraries, Mr. Smurfitt, under cover of his umbrella, returned to Unicorn Mansion, to eat his lonely dinner.

Yet loneliness in dining was less a misfortune to Mr. Smurfitt than it is to many. He liked his dinner, not so much for the sociability of the meal as for the thing itself. A *table d'hôte* would, without doubt, have been more agreeable to him than a solitary cover, for at a *table d'hôte* there is greater variety and more of it, but the season was so bad that a *table d'hôte* was impossible. Mr. Smurfitt was the only occupant of Unicorn Mansion, and consequently his dinner was served in his "private apartment," a luxury forced upon him by the proprietor, who tried to persuade him to take the whole floor. This costly kindness, however, Mr. Smurfitt resisted, and limited himself to a sitting-room and bedroom, communicating with each other. Mr. Smurfitt, then, ate his soup, his fish (which came from London), his mutton, his fowl, his stewed mushrooms, his maccaroni, his damson tart, his custard, his Chedder cheese, his watercresses, with the appetite of a man to whom dining was the most important function of life; with the same consideration for himself he disposed of a pint of brown sherry and a jug of pale ale; sighed over absent prawns, of which they gave him hopes on the morrow; and then seriously addressed himself to the task of discussing a bottle of port, by the aid of which he trusted to get through the evening, till it was time to wind up with the customary cigar and glass of hot brandy-and-water.

While Mr. Smurfitt is engaged in his pleasant occupation, I may as well describe the situation of Unicorn Mansion, as it has something to do with the events which subsequently befel that gentleman during his sojourn at Shingleton.

Possessing what the local house-agents call "a noble frontage," Shingleton is cut at right angles by numerous streets, which, with symmetrical regularity, lead towards the sea. In Marine-street—not that it has a more marine character than any other—four doors from the corner of Marine Parade, stands Unicorn Mansion, opposite to which, and forming the other angle of the street, with a good share of the noble frontage, rises a large block of buildings, a part of it forming The Giant Hotel, an edifice whose proportions are adapted to its name and to the ambitious designs of its projector. It would, perhaps, have been more consonant with that ambition if The Giant Hotel had occupied the entire block, but the hotel itself was an afterthought, a large boarding-house—when it held any boarders—constituting the actual corner, the entrance to which was in Marine-street. A little lower down, and exactly facing Unicorn Mansion, was a small, elegant-looking house, with plate-glass windows, brown *jalousies*, and a light balcony, that ran round the curve of the

drawing-room floor. Beyond this, again, were houses of a more ordinary kind.

In the early part of the day, before *ennui* drove him out to the Royal Promenade Rooms, Mr. Smurfitt had reconnoitred the street he lived in as far as his eye could reach. There were lodgings to let at every house, save at the pretty one directly in front; but though no card bearing the word "Apartments" was visible, the rooms, well furnished as they were, appeared tenantless.

"No prawns, and nothing to look at," growled Mr. Smurfitt, as he withdrew from the window, and prepared to sally forth.

This—as far as relates to the latter part of his surly ejaculation—was the state of the case in the morning; but with evening a change came over the scene. As Mr. Smurfitt, half way through his bottle of port, was sitting in the twilight, meditating—is it necessary to say, upon prawns?—a gleam of light flashed across the street, and, looking round, he saw that the drawing-room opposite was no longer empty, and on a closer inspection he perceived a lady there.

A man may be as determined an old bachelor as he pleases; he may harden his heart by constant intercourse with horse-hair, bristles, rope-yarn, wicker-work, and a forbidding-looking housekeeper; he may have no higher aspirations, or keener sense of enjoyment, than arise from the anticipation or the realisation of his dinner; but, for all that, if, on a dull evening, at the hour 'twixt dog and wolf, as the French call twilight, with no companion but his own thoughts, and a glass of good wine at his elbow, a determined old bachelor suddenly gets a glimpse of a charming woman, the chances are that curiosity, or some other feeling, will prompt him to try to improve that glimpse into something less transitory.

Whether this be a general rule or not, it at all events applied to Mr. Smurfitt. He had not gone down to the sea-side without being provided with a good pocket-glass, swung race-course or tourist fashion over his shoulders, in a polished leather case. He did not wear this instrument at dinner, but it hung within reach on the back of a chair, and now he put forth his hand and took it. The room he sat in was wrapt in obscurity; therefore, without being himself seen, he could use his telescope with impunity. Adjusting it to the proper range, he brought the face of the lady within the required focus. Mr. Smurfitt was astonished at her loveliness. She was the most beautiful creature his eyes had ever gazed on. She was making tea, and as she stirred her cup, a whiter or more delicate hand it was impossible to behold. But her face, as the lamp-light fell upon it, riveted his attention. It was a perfect oval, with a cloven chin, a small, sweetly-shaped mouth, large lustrous eyes, whose lashes swept the cheeks, eyebrows of the most equal curve, a forehead of dazzling whiteness, and shining dark hair, the full volume of which, behind the arching braid, was imprisoned within a silken net, that kept it from wandering over the shoulders.

You may imagine how entranced Mr. Smurfitt was when I say that for five-and-thirty minutes without interruption (save once, to blow his nose, for he had a slight cold in his head; but he did it as gently as possible), he never took his eyes off the fair stranger. He might, indeed, have continued in the same attitude for as much longer, if a person dressed like a waiter had not entered the lady's room, removed the tea-things,

and then drawn down the blinds, leaving nothing to reward Mr. Smurfitt's perseverance but the light that shone through one or two casual chinks, an emanation, Mr. Smurfitt thought, from the lovely form within.

For Mr. Smurfitt to harbour such a thought betokened something detrimental to the continuance of the iron sway of Mrs. Bruff; and the sigh which he heaved as he returned to his port led to a like conclusion. He finished his port, nevertheless; and the rain having abated, smoked his cigar beneath his own verandah, his eyes turned wistfully all the while to the close-drawn *jalousies*. But Mr. Smurfitt took nothing by the latter motion, the slight streaks of light disappeared, and the lady's room was left in darkness. She was gone! Ah, whither? Presumptuous Smurfitt, what is that to thee? Ring for thy chamber-candlestick and betake thee, too, to thy couch! Mr. Smurfitt did ring; but it was to order his brandy-and-water. It was brought—and two wax-lights with it. Of the last Mr. Smurfitt took no heed, nor did the smoking compound really engage his attention; for, though he sipped and stirred, and stirred and sipped, till, like Geoffrey Crayon under somewhat similar circumstances, nothing was left but the spoon, his mind was absent from the process. At length, when the jingling metal recalled his scattered senses, he rose and went to bed.

Though the rain had ceased, the wind continued fresh, and Mr. Smurfitt did not sleep so soundly as usual. A hearty dinner with no subsequent exercise, the prawn failure, the feminine apparition, and speculations on strong tiles and chimney-pots, combined to disturb his rest; but after all, like most people who say they haven't slept a wink, he made it out pretty well, and got up with his accustomed alacrity, having always been an early riser. To his honour be it said—though perhaps Mrs. Bruff would not agree with me—his first movement was to go to the window and examine the house opposite. The examination was fruitless. No outward sign betrayed that any one was stirring; the *jalousies*, upstairs and down, were all hermetically closed. Mr. Smurfitt hummed a tune, but broke down in the middle; shaved, but cut himself; dressed, but forgot his boots, and went out for his morning walk in slippers. On his return, invigorated and hopeful, he sat down to breakfast. Another apology for absent prawns. Mr. Smurfitt could not suppress a growl, but on the whole he bore the announcement better than the waiter expected. There were mutton-chops, broiled ham, bloaters, muffins, toast, and coffee—and—and—something else—which arrived when these things were despatched. The long-looked-for crustaceans? Not a bit of it. They slumbered still in the bed of Ocean—but, released from her slumbers, there entered the room in which he had seen her on the previous evening, the lady of whom—whisper it not to Mrs. Bruff—he had been so constantly thinking.

Her morning dress was even more *piquant* than her evening attire, or perhaps daylight enabled Mr. Smurfitt to observe it more clearly; her face, too, seemed more radiant than when he saw it by lamp-light—it was like the freshness of the morning itself, Aurora in her car, Anadyomene rising from the sea—images which did not occur to Mr. Smurfitt, whose recollections were not classical. But, unfamiliar as he might be with Dr. Smith's dictionary, he fully appreciated female beauty, and mentally gave the palm to the unknown fair one over every woman in

the world. Woman? angel, rather! An angel of two-and-twenty! That seemed about her age.

But though never before caught in the toils of love—I need hardly say that he was fairly in for it now—Mr. Smurfitt behaved like an adept. Others of more impetuosity—younger men, it may be—would have asked the waiter to tell them who the young lady was that lived over the way—would have made some demonstration to attract her attention. Mr. Smurfitt did nothing of the kind. He kept his discovery perfectly quiet, and, that he might the better enjoy it, masked his position with a large arm-chair, behind which he stationed himself with his pocket-glass, observant of everything that took place in the lady's room.

She, wholly unconscious of being made "the cynosure of neighbouring eyes," pursued her avocations as calmly as when she knelt to her devotions. Like Mr. Smurfitt—though not on such gross materials—she also breakfasted, and for her sake—absolutely for hers, and with no *arrière pensée* on his own account—Mr. Smurfitt wished she had had some prawns. If this generous desire does not reveal the intensity of Mr. Smurfitt's passion, I am at a loss to imagine what can! Just as the lady finished her breakfast, the servant who waited brought in a letter. She opened it eagerly, read it with a heightened colour, and smiled. Oh, how Mr. Smurfitt was moved by that heightened colour—how he envied the writer who had raised that smile! Presently, the letter having been consigned to her bosom, she changed her place, and sat down in that division of the bay-window which commanded a partial view of the Promenade and the distant sea. In that direction her eyes remained fixed, while those of Mr. Smurfitt were as steadfastly bent on her. What would he not have given to have seen those eyes turned, with the same expression in them, upon him! But this was not to be. An hour went by in this manner. Suddenly the lady rose and left the room, but not for long. In less than five minutes—believe it ye who have pretty wives—she returned with her bonnet on—a "love of a bonnet," I must say—took another peep towards the sea, smiled more sweetly than before, and vanished.

Mr. Smurfitt came hastily forward from behind his arm-chair to watch her up the street, expecting every instant to see the street door open, through which, as he imagined, she must necessarily pass. But he waited and waited in vain! So quick of step, such eagerness as her air denoted, a minute—less—half a minute, ought to have sufficed for her reappearance; but five, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, and still she came not. At last he became convinced that she had made her exit in some other direction, though he was puzzled to think how that could be, for apparently there was no other entrance to the pretty little house but by the door immediately opposite.

This beautiful creature away, Mr. Smurfitt had no longer any inducement to remain at home. She was gone only for a walk. He would take a walk too. Possibly—nay, very likely—they might meet. Should he take off his hat to her if they did? Should he presume upon the *laisser aller* of a watering-place, and attempt to make her acquaintance? He didn't know what he should do: he would be guided by circumstances. It is the wisest course in most cases—certainly the safest in that of Mr. Smurfitt. Once out of doors and on the Royal Promenade, he looked east and west, with his telescope to his eye, but nobody filled

its field at all resembling her he sought: he gazed shoreward, with the same result: two or three bathing women in blue gowns and crushed bonnets—but no gown or bonnet like hers; here and there a stooping figure picking up shells, but no figure that recalled her image—besides, the attitudes of the stooping figures were alike unfeminine and absurd—impossible ones for Mr. Smurfitt's Divinity!

With a less elastic step, Mr. Smurfitt continued his walk. He was in no mood for society, and turning away from the Royal Promenade Rooms, followed the road by the shore that led from Shingleton. For a mile or so he kept in the same direction: then, being a bad walker and feeling tired, he sat down on a mound that overlooked the sea. The coast at this part was indented, the ground never more than five or six feet above the shore, and occasionally sinking to its level. Mr. Smurfitt watched the sea-gulls as they screamed to the rising gale or floated in the trough of the wave, wishing for wings like theirs, if not to flee away and be at rest, to fly to some place unknown and find the person he wanted. Without the aid of a pair of wings and only guided by his ears, he found what he sought—and more than he sought. During a temporary lull, as well of the elements as of the sea-birds' cry, Mr. Smurfitt fancied he heard voices near him. He listened, and was convinced of the fact. The clear, silver accents of woman, the deeper tones of man, fell on his ear—the latter shaped once—he thought—to the epithet "dearest!" Mr. Smurfitt turned towards the point from which the sounds proceeded, raised himself on his knees, stretched out his neck—"craned" I believe is the proper word, but Mr. Smurfitt's neck was very unlike a crane's—and saw, within a few feet of him, a hat and a bonnet. The hat was a stranger to him, but the bonnet—surely he had seen that before, and not an hour ago! In his anxiety to satisfy himself, Mr. Smurfitt leaned too far forward, toppled over, and rolled headlong on the beach!

A faint scream, something in a louder key, that fell harshly on Mr. Smurfitt's sensorium, and, as he lay struggling on his back, a vision of two persons hastily climbing the bank, were the reward of his curiosity. Before he could recover his legs, the "parties"—as Mr. Smurfitt inwardly defined them—had regained the road and were hastening towards Shingleton; but remote as they already were, his suspicion respecting the owner of the bonnet was confirmed—and though dimmed by distance, which, in this instance, lent no enchantment to the view—the second retreating figure presented the outline of a well-made, active, vigorous young man.

Morose and gloomy, Mr. Smurfitt returned to Shingleton. On the Royal Promenade, he met his acquaintance, The Twaddler. But that he wanted to ask a question, Mr. Smurfitt would have passed him: so he stopped.

"Good morning, sir," said The Twaddler; "hope you're well! Thought we should have met before! Blowy day again, sir—all against the prawns."

"Can you tell me," replied Mr. Smurfitt, not noticing what The Twaddler said, "who lives at the house next but one to the corner in Marine-street?"

"Mr. Prigge, the M.C.," smirked The Twaddler; "his name's on the door. Had a call, hey? Have to drop your guinea! No escaping Mr. Prigge! Ha! ha! ha!"

Mr. Smurfitt had noticed the M.C.'s brass plate. "I don't mean there," he grumbled; "opposite."

"Opposite! Next but one? Let me see! That belongs to The Giant Hotel."

"I thought the hotel looked this way."

"So it does, and the entrance is in the next street—Ocean-street."

"How can that belong to the hotel, then?"

"Oh, there's a covered way to it. Behind the house you speak of is the Snuggery. Private part of the hotel. Just the same as if you were at home—no noise, no bustle. Newly married couples always go there."

"But there's an entrance also in Marine-street?"

"Oh no! That's only a dummy. Never used. Knocker screwed down. Mere make-believe."

"Do you know any la——that's to say, any one now staying at The Giant?"

"Let me see! Mrs. Carfiddle,—no,—she went away the day before yesterday. Mr. Plumps. He's there still. Saw him in his Spanish hat this morning. Lady Baggs is expected. Fine-looking person, Lady Baggs. Met her at Scarborough last autumn. Great addition to society——"

Mr. Smurfitt waited to hear no more, but turned abruptly to go.

"God bless me!" exclaimed The Twaddler, "how you've dirtied your coat! All down to the tails! What can you have been rubbing against? Allow me to brush it off!"

"Let it alone!" growled Mr. Smurfitt. "I shall do very well. Your servant!"

"Rather bearish, I must say," soliloquised The Twaddler, as Mr. Smurfitt lumbered off, his back being stiff and painful: people at fifty-five don't tumble about with impunity.

Arrived at his own door, Mr. Smurfitt's first glance was directed towards the Snuggery window. There sat the Beauty, as placid as if she were carved in alabaster. A book was in her hand, but her eyes wandered from the page. Mr. Smurfitt changed his tactics. He cast his timidity to the winds, and, looking boldly up, took off his hat. The Beauty observed him. Surprise was the first expression on her face, but after a pause for recollection, it changed to displeasure; the colour rose to her cheek, she frowned angrily, and quietly moved away; she had, doubtless, recognised the awkward intruder of an hour ago. In her haste, however, to leave the window, she did not perceive that Mr. Smurfitt entered his lodging.

Whether he supposed this to be the case, or was determined not to be put down, may be a disputed question, but, at all events, Mr. Smurfitt behaved with less discretion than he had previously observed. It was not so much the ardour of passion that threw him on a headlong course as—I am sorry to say—a sinister calculation. He had, in a manner, surprised the lady's secret, and wished to make her feel that he was master of it.

"That young fellow," said Mr. Smurfitt, "called me 'a confounded stupid fool!' She shall see I am not such a fool as he took me for. Wait till she comes back to the window!"

After a brief interval she did come back, utterly unaware that the person who had annoyed her was at that moment her *vis-à-vis*. From the position in which she sat, she could not see what took place in Mr. Smurfitt's room, unless her head was turned towards it. To make her do so

was Mr. Smurfitt's desire. Dumb show could not accomplish this,—though he made use of it in the first instance, smiling and waving his hand to attract her attention; but perceiving that his efforts were all thrown away, and that if she raised her eyes from her book it was only to cast them seaward, he had recourse to another expedient. Suddenly throwing up the window, he stepped out into the balcony, and coughed loudly. The noise he made caused her to look round, and then began a furious pantomime on the part of Mr. Smurfitt. First he nodded, then he winked his eye, then he pointed in the direction of the sea-shore, then he shook his head, then he grinned, and then placed his hand on his heart, bowing profoundly. He was an ass for his pains, for he made no impression on the Beauty. She started at first seeing him, and her countenance betrayed a sense of annoyance; but she soon conquered the feeling, and calmly surveyed him, with an air of proud contempt. Mr. Smurfitt was in ecstasies; enough for him that the Beauty did not withdraw; he took no heed of anything else, but kissed his hand again and again. At last she rose, and without manifesting any sign of anger or emotion, quietly lowered the *jalousies* of two of the windows, leaving the third untouched, so that she could still look out in the direction she preferred, without herself being seen. Mr. Smurfitt set this down to a cause the very reverse of the reality.

"I mustn't do it too openly," he said to himself. "People down the street might see. She's afraid of that. I've pretty soon cut that young jackanapes out."

Mr. Smurfitt, therefore, abandoned the balcony, and continued his delicate attentions under closer cover. He could just see the flounce of the Beauty's dress where it swept the floor.

"Sly puss!" said Mr. Smurfitt, "I know what she's at. I shall catch one of those bright little twinklers presently, peeping at me through the blind."

Imagination is powerful, and Mr. Smurfitt's imagination must have been of a high order, for long after the Beauty had left the room, which was not, however, till late in the afternoon, he fancied he saw that "*œil en tapinois,*" *qui le regardait.*

Dinner-time came, but Mr. Smurfitt was too agitated to eat—that is to say, to eat his accustomed quantity with his usual deliberate appetite. He bolted without tasting what was set before him, made no inquiry about prawns, and the moment the cloth was removed resumed his siege operations.

As on the night before, a lamp was in the room, but unlike the night before, the lamp revealed nothing. Mr. Smurfitt grew impatient. He paced up and down, went into the balcony, found the wind too much for him, and came back again. He ordered candles—two fresh wax-lights were brought—and he placed them beside him. The device was useless. He tried darkness again, but still with the same result: the Beauty made no sign. Once or twice he thought he saw shadows pass behind her blinds. Jealousy then possessed him. Somebody else was there. That young jackanapes, perhaps! She might allow of an interview at night which she feared to grant in the morning. Swayed by conflicting feelings, all of them distressing, Mr. Smurfitt passed a very uncomfortable vening. The pain in his back increased—unmistakable symptoms de-

clared that his cold was worse—and—the only wise thing he had done all day—he closed the window in a huff, and took himself off to bed.

If the wind had been high the night before, it now raged a perfect hurricane: his very bed rocked under him, and he, though a heavy man, rocked in his bed: the tempest shook the room, but what was that to the tempest in Mr. Smurfitt's bosom, in which warring passions were making such wild havoc! The old figment of sleeplessness was now a sad reality. Every time he turned, his bruises admonished him; every sigh he uttered was stifled by a sneeze; and to add to his misfortunes, once—just as he was dozing off—he was seized with the cramp in both calves, a seizure that made him shriek with pain. He rose in the morning, neither a wiser nor a better man: his cold was much worse, and the stiffness in his back, increased by rheumatism, had enlarged its area. Not much like a lover, you will say. His passion, nevertheless, was not extinguished. Once more he returned to the charge, practising the original dodge of keeping in the background, that he might lure the Beauty to her casement.

On her part, that which took place was in some respects a repetition of the previous morning. She breakfasted, received a letter, and smiled—received a second letter, and looked grave. Again she chose her favourite seat, and gazed up the street with more than her first intensity. A flash of intelligence again illumined her lovely face. She raised her hand, and disappeared.

"To put on her bonnet, I suppose," said Mr. Smurfitt. "I'll be even with her to-day. Out as soon as she! But I must get a thicker pair of boots."

The lumbago, or whatever afflicted Mr. Smurfitt, made this a work of time, and when he came back to his sitting-room, instead of seeing the Beauty in her bonnet, he perceived her busily writing at a distant table. The pocket-glass was once more put in requisition, but before Mr. Smurfitt could bring it to bear on her occupation, another kind of writing met his astonished eyes.

Shingleton is a place that is always in extremes. If it rains, you may be sure it pours; and the moment the rain is over, if any wind be abroad, clouds of dust fill the air: it gets into your eyes, down your throat, and lodges everywhere. There had been plenty of dust during the last four-and-twenty hours, and it had not spared the Beauty's windows: inside and out it had covered them with a thick coating. But an attempt had been made to remove it. Was that the object of the marks which Mr. Smurfitt traced upon the panes? I imagine not, for when people take the trouble to clean their windows, they do not write upon them, least of all in such large, distinct characters as to be legible in the street. One word only, repeated on each window, was there. Mr. Smurfitt spelt it slowly. He was no prophet, but he easily made it out.

The word was "IMPOSSIBLE."

As he read, a figure approached from the Promenade. It was the young man who had obligingly favoured Mr. Smurfitt with his candid opinion on the beach. From the direction in which his eyes were raised, it was plain to Mr. Smurfitt that the inscription was meant for his edification.

The young man passed on, making no attempt to bring himself into notice, and Mr. Smurfitt saw him turn the corner of the street.

But scarcely was he out of sight, before an open carriage, driven by a large elderly man, pulled up at the Beauty's door. At the sound of the wheels, she ran to the window and opened it.

"You can't get in there," she said, laughing a clear, ringing laugh; "you must go round."

"Very well, dear," replied the large elderly man.

It was evident to Mr. Smurfitt that he immediately did as he had been told; for a great deal sooner than he expected—not so soon, however, as to prevent the Beauty from folding up her letter and secreting it—he entered the apartment where she was, and the next moment her lovely form was encircled by the monster's arms.

Mr. Smurfitt made use of these objectionable terms as—refusing to see more—he dashed his hat on the floor, threw himself into an arm-chair, and bellowed like a beaten schoolboy. At this moment the door opened, and a waiter appeared.

"I hope, sir, you haven't quite done breakfast, for I've brought you some prawns!"

"The Devil take the Prawns," shouted Mr. Smurfitt, snatching the dish from the hands of the affrighted waiter—"the Devil take the Prawns!"

And, uttering these words, he hurled them out of the window.

None saw the rash act but the waiter, for the opposite room was empty.

* * * * * *

From that hour to this the Beauty is remembered by Mr. Smurfitt as—

"THE SHINGLETON MYSTERY."

THE SHIPWRECKED ONE.

BY E. A. BOWRING.

SHIPWRECK'D and lost on this far, foreign strand,
After life's many shipwrecks here at last
I lie in peace; my troubles all are past.
A simple peasant closed with kindly hand

My death-glazed eyes; my tomb is in this sand.
The screaming sea-bird skims above me fast,
I'm laugh'd at by the fierce and wintry blast,
While o'er me rushing t'ward some distant land.

A cruel world will now its pity give,
Say I was wretched while 'twas mine to live,
And still more wretched, in that I am drown'd.
No! wreck'd was I through lifetime, but the storm
Which cast upon this coast my lifeless form
Hath brought me to my haven, safe and sound.